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SUBJECT: ITALY: PRODI FACES COALITION TEST

REF: A. ROME 275
[1](#)B. ROME SIPRNET DAILY REPORT FEBRUARY 2 2007
[1](#)C. ROME SIPRNET DAILY REPORT FEBRUARY 9 2007
[1](#)D. ROME 238

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary -----

[1](#)1. (C/NF) PM Prodi has used recent controversies related to a U.S. military base expansion and Italy's Afghan mission to rally the leaders of his diverse nine-party coalition. But with some dissidents in the Senate potentially beyond the control of even radical party leaders, the real test for Prodi is whether his government will be able to keep those dissidents on board. FM D'Alema's February 21 appearance before the Senate could be an indicator of Prodi's ability to do so. END SUMMARY.

RADICAL PARTY LEADERS UNIFY AROUND PRODI -----

[1](#)2. (C/NF) On the heels of the February 6 emergency meeting of center-left party leaders and government officials, Communist Renewal (RC) Party Secretary Franco Giordano warned dissident radical parliamentarians to hold to the government's line in the upcoming vote on renewing Italy's military mission in Afghanistan. In the unusual public warning to his own party, Giordano stated, "we cannot allow the government to fall" because it would imply a return to government of former PM Berlusconi and Italy's involvement in Iraq. At the same time, three radical ministers drew back from plans to participate in the February 17 demonstration against the U.S. Army's Dal Molin expansion project in Vicenza. According to Vice Minister of Interior Marco Minnitti, PM Romano Prodi used the February 6 meeting to solidify his coalition around the government's foreign policy, and all party leaders, including the radicals, are on board (REF A).

BUT DO THE LEADERS CONTROL THEIR MEMBERS? -----

[1](#)3. (C/NF) During his recent meeting with Pol M/C, Minnitti stated that the government does not have an effective majority in the Senate and that just a handful of dissident Senators could disrupt the majority. Andrea Vitale, Chief of Staff to the RC Chamber Whip, confirmed to Poloff that Prodi's problem is not with the radical parties, per se, but

with dissident members. He said that party leaders like Oliviero Diliberto of the Italian Communist Party (PdCI) respond to the logic of political compromise for the sake of remaining in government. Vitale continued that Chamber President Fausto Bertinotti (the real leader of RC) made a serious tactical error when he put "trouble-makers" in the Senate instead of in the Chamber, as it was clear the margin in the Senate would be tight and party discipline would be at a premium there. In a contentious vote, Vitale concluded, Bertinotti cannot guarantee the votes of these dissidents. (Note: At the last party conference, Bertinotti was confirmed with 60 percent of the party vote. The large minority consists of unrepentant Trotskyites and a variety of social extremists not beholden to Bertinotti. End Note.)

D'ALEMA'S APPEARANCE IN THE SENATE AN IMPORTANT BAROMETER

14. (C/NF) FM D'Alema is scheduled to appear before the Senate on February 21 in order to present the government's foreign policy agenda. His appearance will occur on the heels of the February 17 anti-Dal Molin demonstration, which all observers predict will have an impact one way or the other: either calming the waters or roiling them further. Forza Italia Senate Group Leader Renato Schifani told the Ambassador February 7 that the opposition plans a similar parliamentary move to the one that technically resulted in the government losing its majority over the issue of Dal Molin (REF B). Vitale predicted that D'Alema's Senate appearance will be a strong indicator of the government's ability to maintain a cohesive foreign policy.

15. (C/NF) COMMENT: One clear effect of the recent controversies over the Dal Molin base expansion and the six ambassadors' op-ed has been Prodi's successful move to rally coalition leaders. He has even thrown the radicals a political bone by promising them legislation allowing civil

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unions (REF C), presumably to be delivered after upcoming foreign policy votes are finished. However, the real challenge will be whether he can keep the "extreme radicals", especially in the Senate, on board (REF D). END COMMENT.
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